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SUBJECT: EGYPT'S FOREIGN MINISTRY RAISES DETENTION OF
TERRORISM SUSPECT

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

1.(SBU) Summary: During a meeting on January 3, Sherif Issa, legal advisor to Egypt's Foreign Minister, complained to us about the treatment Egyptian national Ahmed Abdellatif Sherif Mohamed, one of the two Egyptian University of South Florida students being held on terrorism charges in Tampa, is receiving. While thanking the USG for facilitating the recent visit of Abdellatif's parents to the U.S. to see their son, Issa warned that the conditions of his pre-trial confinement could be turning him in to an extremist. According to Sherif, Egypt's Ministry Of Foreign Affairs is not following the case of Abdellatif,s co-defendant, Yousef Samir Megahed, because he is a green card holder and has a very supportive and vocal family in the U.S. End Summary.

2.(SBU) Issa opened by thanking us for facilitating the travel of Abdellatif,s mother and father to the U.S. in December. He praised the Embassy for issuing visas to the parents in "no time." He said Abdellatif,s parents were treated well in the U.S. and were especially grateful that they were permitted to visit their son in a room without bars or other dividers.

3.(SBU) Issa then turned to the conditions of Abdellatif's pre-trial confinement. He said Abdellatif's parents, and the MFA, are concerned about his physical and mental health. According to Issa, Abdellatif is held in solitary confinement. (Note: Jail officials told Abdellatif,s GOE-financed lawyer that this is for his protection. End note.) Issa said this is putting great mental strain on Abdellatif, that he is "losing his judgment," and now devotes his days to prayer. Issa fears that if Abdellatif is found innocent and is not now a terrorist, this experience will have turned him in to one. He also complained that Abdellatif is a "big eater" and is not receiving sufficient food. Issa said he has no comment on Abdellatif,s guilt or innocence (although he said that the "fireworks" found in his car may have been "understandable" given that Abdellatif was on his way to "celebrate his birthday with friends"), but asked if a way could be found to ease the conditions of his confinement.

14. (SBU) Issa also said that the legal process seems to be moving slowly. Issa said that Egypt is often criticized for holding terrorism suspects for long periods without trial (he used Congressional criticism of the draft anti-terrorism law as an example), and said it would be hard for the Egyptian press and public to see the difference between Abdellatif,s situation and those for which Egypt is often criticized.

(Note: We asked if Abdullatif's lawyer had requested that the case be brought quickly to trial. Issa conceded that the lawyer had in fact requested a delay. End note.) He said that to date, media coverage of the case has been limited in Egypt because Abdellatif's parents have not spoken out, fearing publicity could harm their son's case.

15. (SBU) Comment: We frequently raise cases of jailed oppositionists, such as Ayman Nour, with the MFA. The MFA may be using Abdellatif's case as a counterpoint to our approaches on human rights issues. Nonetheless, Issa appeared genuinely concerned about potential negative public perceptions of the case in Egypt.

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